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SOME ECCENTRIC CHARACTERS OF EARLY LOS ANGELES

BY J. M. GUINN.

The early years in the history of the new towns of the West were productive of eccentric characters—men who drifted in from older civilizations and made a name for themselves or rather, as it frequently happened, had a name made for them by their fellow men.

These local celebrities gained notoriety in their new homes by their oddities, by their fads, their crankiness, or some other characteristic that made them the subject of remark. With some the eccentricity was natural; with others it was cultivated, and yet again with others force of circumstances or some event not of their own choosing made them cranks or oddities, and gave them nick-names that stuck to them closer than a brother.

No country in the world was more productive of quaint characters and odd geniuses than the mining camps of early California. A man's history began with his advent in the camp. His past was wiped out—was ancient history, not worth making a note of. What is he now? What is he good for? were the vital questions. Even his name was sometimes wiped out, and he was re-christened—given some cognomen entirely foreign to his well-known characteristics. It was the Irony of Fate that stood sponsor at his baptism. "Pious Pete" was the most profane man in the camp, and Pete was not his front name. His profanity was so profuse, so impressive, that it seemed an invocation, almost a prayer.

Deacon Sturgis was a professional gambler of malodorous reputation, but of such a solemn face and dignified mien that he often deceived the very elect. Sometimes these nick-names were utilized in advertising. I recollect a sign over a livery stable in the early mining days of Idaho, which informed the public that the Pioneer Stables were kept by Jews Harp Jack and Web-Foot Haley. On one corner of the sign was painted an immense jews-harp; on another corner was a massive foot with webs between the toes. Haley came from Oregon, and

as the legend goes, on account of the incessant rains in the big Willamette Valley the inhabitants there, from paddling around in the water, grow webs between their toes. Haley brought his nick-name and his webs with him. How Jews Harp Jack picked up his name I do not know. In a residence of several years there I never heard any other name for the man.

My first mining partner was known as Friday. Not one in fifty of his acquaintance knew that his real name was William Geddes. Years before in California he had owned in a claim with a man named Robinson. Robinson was a man of many expedients and make-shifts. Geddes was an imitator or echo of his partner. The miners dubbed the first "Robinson Crusoe" and the other "My Man Friday," a name that followed him through a dozen mining camps, and over two thousand miles of territory. If he is still living I doubt whether he has outlived that nick-name.

Bret Harte, in his "Outcasts of Poker Flat," has, in John Oakhurst, pictured the refined and intelligent gambler. There were very few of that class in the mines, and none that carried around such an elegant and aristocratic name as Oakhurst. In the Idaho mines, where I was initiated into placer mining, the professionals of the pasteboard fraternity, who were mostly old Californians, had all been re-christened by their constituents or patrons, and the new cognomen given each was usually more expressive than elegant. Vinegar Bill, Cross Roads Jack, Snapping Andy and Short-Card Pete are short-cut names of real characters, who passed in their checks years ago; i. e., died with their boots on. Each nick-name recalls some eccentricity not complimentary to the bearer, but which he had to bear without wincing. It was one way in which their victimized patrons tried to get even on the deal.

There was another class of eccentricities in the cities and towns of California where life was less strenuous than in the mining camps. These were men with whims or fads sometimes sensible, sometimes half-insane, to which they devoted themselves until they became noted as notorious cranks.

San Francisco had its Philosopher Pickett, its Emperor Norton and a host of others of like ilk. Los Angeles had representatives of this class in its early days, but unfortunately the memory of but few of them has been salted down in the brine of history.

In delving recently among the rubbish of the past for scraps of history, I came across a review of the first book printed in

Los Angeles—the name of the book, its author and its publisher. But for that review, these would have been lost to fame.

It is not probable that a copy of the book exists, and possibly no reader of that book is alive today—not that the book was fatal to its readers; it had very few—but the readers were fatal to the book; they did not preserve it. That book was the product of an eccentric character. Some of you knew him. His name was William Money, but he preferred to have the accent placed on the last syllable, and was known as Money'. Bancroft says of him: "A Scotchman, the date and manner of whose coming are not known, was at Los Angeles in 1843." I find from the old archives he was here as early as 1841. In the winter of 1841-42 he made repairs on the Plaza Church to the amount of \$126.00. Bancroft, in his Pioneer Register, states: "He is said to have come as the servant of a scientific man, whose methods and ideas he adopted. His wife was a handsome Sonoreña. In '46 the couple started for Sonora with Coronel, and were captured by Kearny's force. They returned from the Colorado with the Mormon battalion. Money became an eccentric doctor, artist and philosopher at San Gabriel, where his house, in 1880, was filled with ponderous tomes of his writings, and on the simple condition of buying \$1,000 worth of these I was offered his pioneer reminiscences. He died a few years later. His wife, long divorced from him, married a Frenchman. She was also living at Los Angeles in '80. It was her daughter who killed Chico Forster."

Bancroft fails to enumerate all of Money's titles. He was variously called Professor Money, Dr. Money and Bishop Money. He was a self-constituted doctor, and a self-anointed bishop. He aspired to found a great religious sect. He made his own creed and ordained himself Bishop, Deacon and Defender of the Reformed New Testament Church of the Faith of Jesus Christ. Dr. Money had the inherent love of a Scotchman for theological discussion. He was always ready to attack a religious dogma or assail a creed. When not discussing theological questions or practicing medicines, he dabbled in science and made discoveries.

In Book II of Miscellaneous Records of Los Angeles County, is a map or picture of a globe labeled, Wm. Money's Discovery of the Ocean. Around the North Pole are a number of convolving lines which purport to represent a "whirling ocean." Passing down from the north pole to the south, like

the vertebrae of a great fish, is a subterranean ocean. Beyond this on each side are the exhaustless fiery regions, and outside of this a rocky mountain chain that evidently keeps the earth from bursting. At the South Pole gush out two currents a mile wide marked the Kuro Siwo. There is no explanation of the discovery and no statement of which ocean, the whirling or the subterranean, that Dr. Money claimed to have discovered. The record was made no doubt on the principle of protecting his discovery by a sort of patent right on the ocean he found swirling around in the interior of the earth. The theory of his discovery can only be inferred from the drawing. Evidently a hole at the North Pole sucks in the waters of the whirling ocean, which pass down through the subterranean ocean and are heated by the exhaustless fiery regions which border that ocean; then these heated waters are spurted out into space at the South Pole. What becomes of them afterwards the records do not show. From some cause Dr. Money disliked the people of San Francisco. In his scientific researches he made the discovery that that part of the earth's crust on which that city stands was almost burnt through, and he prophesied that the crust would soon break and the City of the Bay would drop down into the exhaustless fiery regions and be wiped out like Sodom and Gomorrah of old.

The review of Dr. Money's book, which I have mentioned, was written by the genial Col. John O. Wheeler, then editor of the *Southern Californian*, a paper that died and was buried in the journalistic graveyard of unfelt wants, forty-eight years ago. Colonel Wheeler was a walking library of local history. He could tell a story well and had a fund of humorous ones, but I could never persuade him to write out his reminiscences for publication. He died, and his stories of the olden times died with him, just as so many of the old pioneers will do, die and leave no record behind them.

Dr. Money's book was written and published in 1854. Colonel Wheeler's review is quite lengthy, filling nearly two columns of the *Californian*. I omit a considerable portion of it. The review says: "We are in luck this week, having been the recipients of a very interesting literary production entitled, *Reform of the New Testament Church*, by Wm. Money, Bishop, Deacon and Defender of the Faith of Jesus Christ.

"The volume by Professor Money comes to us bound in the beautiful coloring so much admired by the Woman in Scarlet

who sits upon seven hills, and is finely gotten up and executed at the Star office in this city. Its title denotes the general objects of the work which have been followed out in the peculiar style of the well-known author, and in the emphatic language of the Council General, Upper California, City of Los Angeles. "We pronounce it a work worthy of all dignified admiration, a reform which ecclesiastics and civil authorities have not been able to comply with yet."

The work opens with an original letter from the aforesaid Council General, which met August the 7th, 1854, near the main zanja in this city; said letter was indited, signed, sealed "by supplication of the small flock of Jesus Christ" represented by Ramon Tirado, president, and Francis Contreras, secretary, and directed with many tears to the great defender of the new faith, who, amid the quiet retreats with which the rural districts abound, had pensively dwelt on the noble objects of his mission, and, in fastings and prayer, concocted, this great work of his life."

"The venerable prelate, in an elaborate prefix to his work, informs the public that he was born, to the best of his recollection, about the year 1807, from which time up to the anniversary of his seventh year, his mother brought him up by hand. He says, by a singular circumstance (the particular circumstance is not mentioned), I was born with four teeth, and with the likeness of a rainbow in my right eye."

It would seem that his early youth was marked by more than ordinary capacity, as we find him at seven entering upon the study of natural history; how far he proceeded, or if he proceeded at all, is left for his readers to determine. At the age of twelve, poverty compelled him to "bind himself to a paper factory." Next year, being then thirteen years of age, having made a raise, he commenced the studies of philosophy, civil law, medicine, relation of cause and effect, philosophy of sound in a conch shell, peculiar habits of the muskrat, and the component parts of Swain's vermifuge. Thirsting for still further knowledge, four years afterwards we find him entering upon the study of theology; and as he says, "In this year (1829) I commenced my travels in foreign countries," and the succeeding year found him upon the shores of the United States, indefatigable in body and mind; the closing of the same year found him in Mexico, still following the sciences above mentioned, but theology in particular.

About this time he commenced those powerful discussions with the Romish clergy in which our author launched forth against the Old Church those terrible denunciations as effective as they were unanswerable, and which for thirty years he has been hurling against her.

Perhaps the most memorable of all his efforts was the occasion of the last arguments had with the Roman clergy concerning abuses which came off in the Council of Pitaquitos, a small town in Sonora, commencing on the 20th of October, 1835, and which continued to May 1st, 1840, a period of five years. This convocation had consumed much time in its preparation, and the clergy, aware of the powerful foe with whom they had to deal, and probable great length of time which would elapse, selected their most mighty champions; men, who in addition to a glib tongue and subtle imagination, were celebrated for their wonderful powers of endurance. There were seven skilled disputants arrayed against Money, but he vanquished them single-handed.

"The discussion opened on the following propositions: The Bishop of Culiacan and he of Durango disputed that Wm. Money believed that the Virgin Mary was the mother of Jesus, but not the mother of Christ. William Money makes his application to God, but not to the Virgin Mary."

These and other learned propositions were discussed and re-discussed constantly for five years, during which writing paper arose to such an enormous price that special enactments were made, withdrawing the duties thereon. Time would not admit of detailing the shadow of what transpired during the session.

Suffice it to say that through the indomitable faith and energy of Mr. Money, his seven opponents were entirely overcome; one sickened early in the second year and was constrained to take a voyage by sea; two others died of hemorrhage of the lungs; one went crazy; two became converted and left the council in the year 1838 and were found by Mr. Money on the breaking up of the council to have entered into connubial bonds, and were in the enjoyment of perfect happiness. The other two strenuously held out to the year 1840, when, exhausted, sick and dismayed, the council, in the language of the author, was broken up by offering me money to give up my sword, the Word of God, but I protested, saying, "God keep me from such treacherous men, and from becoming a traitor to my God."

"Thus ended this famous disputation of which history furnishes no parallel. From the foregoing our readers can form an idea of this great work. It forms a volume of twenty-two pages, printed in English and Spanish, with notes, etc.; price not yet determined. We would advise all to procure a copy, as there being no stereotype edition, the present few numbers will end the supply."

This strenuous review brought forth a vigorous protest from Dr. Money, and in the *Star*, over his many titles—Bishop, Deacon and Defender of the Faith—he challenged the editor to a discussion, but, warned by the fate of the friars at Pitaquitos, the genial Colonel declined the combat.

Dr. Money seems to have considered his call to preach paramount to his call to practice. In a card to the public, published in the *Star* of November 3, 1855, he says: "I am sorry to inform the public that since the Reformed New Testament church has unanimously conferred on me the office of Bishop, Deacon and Defender of the Faith of said apostolic church, it is at present inconvenient for me any longer to practice my physical system. My California Family Medical Instructor is now ready for the press, containing my three physical systems, in about 200 pages and 50 plates of the human body. It will likewise contain a list of about five thousand patients that I have had under my physical treatment in the course of fifteen years' practice, from the port of San Diego to that of San Francisco. Out of this large number only four, to my knowledge, have died while under my treatment. I do not publish this for the purpose of getting into practice, but only to get out of it."

His Family Medical Instructor was probably the second book written in Los Angeles, but whether it was ever published I cannot say. Some twenty-five years ago, when the Public Library was in the old Downey Block, he had on file in it a set of plates of the human body. They long since have disappeared. He removed to San Gabriel, where he lived in a curiously constructed adobe house. He died in 1890, at San Gabriel. His books and papers were lost.

Another eccentric character of early days was Professor Cain. Cain was a gentleman of color, aged and white-haired. He towered up in the air at least six and a half feet, and by taking thought had added at least half a cubit to his height in the shape of a tall narrow-brimmed stove-pipe hat of the vintage of the fall of '49 or spring of '50.

Cain was a philosopher, and had original and rather startling theories which he propounded from the steps of the old Court House whenever he could get an audience.

A colored preacher, the Rev. John Jasper, of Richmond, Va., made himself famous by a sermon that he was accustomed to deliver from the text, "The sun do move." In that sermon he demolished the theory that the earth moved around the sun. "The sun does the movin', not the yearth. The good book says that once, when Joshuar had a big killing of Anak-elites on hand; he says 'sun stand still' till I get through with the killin', and she stopped and stood still." Now, said the Rev. Jasper, how could a thing stop if it wasn't going? How, indeed! And the Rev. Jasper removed that theological stumbling block that has tripped over theologians for centuries.

Professor Cain's theory was more original and more startling than Jasper's. It was that the original color of the human race was black. Adam was the first Sambo, and Eve the primitive Dinah. The white race were bleached-out blacks.

Cain's proof was conclusive, if you admit his premises. "The good book, says Adam, was created out of the dust of the yearth. Whar did the Lord get that dust? Cain was accustomed to ask. "In the Garden of Eden. The soil of the garden was a black soil, because it was rich and produced all manner of yarbs and trees. Now, if Adam was made from black dust his color was black, wa'n't it? And Eve being made from Adam's rib, the rib were black, and consequently Eve was black, too."

As long as Adam's descendants remained in warm countries they retained their primitive color, but after a time some of them wandered off to cold countries and lived in the shade of the woods, where the sun could not get at them. Then they began to fade, just as a plant grown in the shade loses its original color and turns white. Consequently, the Professor would say, as he clinched his argument, "The white man is only a faded-out niggah."

Some practical jokers induced the old philosopher to deliver a lecture on his favorite theme. He secured the old Merced Theater, which still stands up near the Pico House. He was to charge an admittance fee, and he acted as his own door-keeper. So popular was his lecture that before he could get through making change with some of the first arrivals the boys had come in a rush and filled the house. He had a full house, but

the receipts were light. In knocking around the world he had picked up a number of big words that he used indiscriminately. He put them in because they sounded well. To give force to his argument he would quote at length from some authority. The quotations were manufactured; the Professor could not read. He would preface a quotation by saying, "Thus says the famous Sock-rats" (meaning Socrates), or "I find this in the writings of the distinguished Hypocrits" (meaning Hippocrates, the father of medicine). The lecture was as amusing as a circus.

The old gentleman was very proud, and quite dignified. In assemblages of the colored brethren, when they did not agree with his views, he was accustomed to berate them as a pa'cel of plantation niggahs. Consequently he was not popular with his colored brethren.

There are some other eccentric characters of early days that might come in for a notice but my paper is already too long.